# Guidelines for leaders

## How to register as a leader

To become a leader, contact a Committee member for approval. The Committee is responsible for taking all reasonable steps to ensure that Club activities are led by capable leaders. If you have not previously led a Club walk, you will need to demonstrate that you have the relevant abilities and experience. Discuss where you want to go and whether you can handle the trip’s degree of difficulty (distance, terrain, navigational complexities). They may discuss your proposed activity and your abilities with other Club members before accepting your offer to lead, or may suggest a co-leader.

## Planning the trip

Gather the information you need to plan the trip e.g. check maps, guide books, climate information and speak to other members or Park rangers. Check whether any restrictions apply to the area where you are planning to walk e.g. limits on party size, designated campsites, fuel stove only areas. Obtain any permits you need to camp or light a fire. You may need to check that your activity complies with the National Park’s Plan of Management, if it is in a designated wilderness area.

Plan the route. It may be advisable to do a pre-trip reconnaissance of part or all of the route. You may need to work out distances and times required to intermediate points. Consider the need for alternatives to cope with weather changes or delays due to illness, injury or slower-than-expected progress.

If you are intending to cross private land, seek permission from the landowner beforehand.

You should also consider your party size. If you wish to run the walk with fewer than four participants, including yourself (e.g. if your group is experienced and you are carrying a Personal Locator Beacon – PLB) or more than 16 (because it is easy), you should seek approval from the Committee when you offer the activity for the Club program or before the activity starts.

You might also consider setting a limit below 16, e.g. in environmentally sensitive areas or if you are a new leader, to make group management easier. It is your decision whether to include a limit in your walk description. If you do not list a limit in your trip description, you may still decide later, after reviewing the weather forecast, experience levels of the people who wish to take part, or other factors, to set a limit.

If, for any reason, the party size drops below four after you leave home, you must, in consultation with the other party members, assess matters such as party strength, difficulty of terrain, remoteness and access to help via mobile phone or Personal Locator Beacon, before deciding whether or not it is be safe to proceed. Similarly, if the party grows above the approved limit, you will need to decide on an appropriate course of action, taking into account the safety of the party and the environment in which you are walking.

It is highly desirable to have someone on the trip with a first aid certificate e.g. from St John Ambulance or Red Cross.

Consider what information other than what is in your walk description that you may need to give to those who contact you about your trip. Participants on walks rated Short/Easy will need only basic information but, for advanced activities, you may need to discuss matters such as any special equipment; skills or experience are needed; availability of water, campsites and shelter; expected weather conditions; possible hazards; whether you expect to, or have to, swim. When talking to prospective participants, try to be as objective as possible: what is simple or easy to you may be daunting to someone new!

## Offering an activity

Essentials of a good activity offer:

* Date
* Trip name
* Grading
* Map name
* Transport details
* Max no. of participants if there is one
* Enough specifics (e.g. place names, grid reference, spot heights) to allow a prospective participant to work out the route on a map.

Really useful:

* Length in kilometres or in hours
* Height gain
* Information on terrain difficulty

## Managing booking requests

You need not accept anyone for your trip whose suitability you doubt, including a concern that a person may not participate harmoniously with others in the party. You may wish to ask for additional information, such as experience in outdoor activities or evidence that a requestor will interact well with a group (eg will be ready on time and courteous to others). Non-members are welcome on Club trips but without clear evidence of adequate experience, it is recommended that you not accept them on trips rated Long or Rough. If you need to reject someone who has expressed an interest in your trip because of lack of fitness or experience, it helps if you can suggest a more suitable alternative from the Club program. You should not accept any child, or any person who requires special support due to a disability, unless they are accompanied by a responsible adult or carer.

It is useful to remind participants that they will need to sign an Acknowledgment of Risks and Obligations form before taking part in your trip. You should mention that the form requires them to advise you of any medical conditions which may affect them. In particular, you should ask whether new participants are asthmatic, epileptic or allergic to insect stings or bites. You should not disclose the medical information received to others without consent, except where necessary for medical treatment or where the safety of the party would otherwise be compromised. Anyone not prepared to sign the form should not book on Club walks and leaders are required to refuse participation to anyone who declines to sign the form when presenting for a walk.

## In the week before the walk

* Decide on the transport arrangements for the trip.
* If intending to walk on public land, confirm that the area in which you are proposing to walk will not be closed to the public on the day(s) of your trip.
* Check the weather forecast; in [hot weather,](https://canberrabushwalkingclub.org/about-us/governance-and-policies/fire-danger-and-hot-weather/) check for a Total Fire Ban.

## Things to bring

You should take the following on the walk:

* A first aid kit
* Maps, compass and, unless the walk is very simple, a GPS
* List of participants, and a blank [Acknowledgement of Risks and Obligations form](https://canberrabushwalkingclub.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Risk_Acknowledgement2.pdf) (PDF)
* A mobile phone, although its coverage is limited in remote areas.
* A Personal Locator Beacon (PLB), especially in remote or difficult country.

## During the trip

At the meeting point for the trip:

* Make sure that everyone has arrived and that everyone has been introduced
* Show the group the route on the map and explain what to expect along the way
* All participants including the Leader must sign the Club’s Acknowledgment of Risks and Obligations form.

On the trip:

* Do not leave until everyone is ready
* Appoint someone to walk at the back of the group if necessary, especially with a large group
* Re-group regularly, and especially if the trip is about to change direction
* Count the participants occasionally. Check often that no one is left behind, especially after stops or in difficult conditions
* Be alert for any hazards or any physical or other problems within the party
* Watch the weather, adjusting your plans if necessary
* Monitor progress against your plan for the trip and make any adjustments necessary to ensure the trips smooth completion.

 In larger groups, consider:

* Asking participants to choose a “buddy” and to check that their buddy is present at re-groups
* Advising participants: ˜tell someone if you need to leave the party, call out if you can’t see the person in front of you, wait if you can’t see the person behind you,
* Giving short briefings occasionally (e.g. “now we will go down this fire trail for about 20 minutes till we reach a creek”).

At the end of the walk:

* Ensure that all participants have returned
* Arrange for drivers to be paid the amounts due under car sharing arrangements and do not leave until all vehicles have started their engines.

## Dealing with problems

If a problem arises, stay calm. Do not be afraid to ask for help from any member of the party or to ask for more experienced participants to take charge if you think they are better equipped to handle the situation. In emergencies on overnight trips, the party’s food, water and equipment may need to be pooled.

#### Being unsure of your location

The use of Global Positioning Systems (GPS) means that it is generally easy to find out where you are. GPS receivers may not work, however, in deep ravines, dense bush or if it is heavily overcast so, while you are strongly encouraged to carry them, you also need to be confident about your general navigational skills. You should encourage members of your party who have a GPS to bring it with them on your trip. It is also wise to carry a spare set of batteries for your GPS.

If you realise that you are unsure of your location, the first question to ask yourself is ˜does it really matter”? In most cases you will still be able to get yourself to a known point and complete your walk without difficulty. For instance, you may be able to retrace your steps until you can re-orient yourself, climb to higher ground and take a GPS reading there or take bearings to known points or head towards a collecting feature, such as a ridge, track or watercourse that will take you where you want to go.

If necessary, discuss options with experienced members of your party. Keep the party together. The convention of ˜if lost wait until rescued” generally only applies if you are truly lost or you cannot move because of safety risks. In this case, you should set up camp in a prominent spot with access to water and use any aids you can to maximise your visibility. If you expect emergency services to be searching for you, stay at your campsite.

#### What if people don’t follow your instructions?

In signing the Club’s Acknowledgment of Risks and Obligations form, all participants agree ˜to accept the instructions of the leader of the activity”. Participation in Club activities is, however, voluntary, and participants retain the right to withdraw from an activity if they wish. A leader thus cannot force a participant to follow instructions. If explanation and encouragement do not result in the participant agreeing to a leader’s instructions, the leader no longer has a responsibility to the participant.

A wise precaution is to ensure that all the drivers are known to you and reliable. Even walkers with independent minds need a lift home.

#### Water crossings

These crossings are potentially dangerous and should be approached with care. Where the water is more than knee deep and running fast, crossings should be avoided.

#### Bad weather

If the weather is bad at the start of your trip or bad weather is forecast, consider cancelling or rerouting the trip. If you proceed, make sure that all participants are properly equipped for the conditions and that no one feels pressured into taking part.

If bad weather occurs during a trip, you should consider modifying or abandoning the trip. Pay particular attention to signs of distress in the party, particularly in [cold, wet and windy conditions](https://canberrabushwalkingclub.org/about-us/governance-and-policies/alpine-conditions/) when the risk of hypothermia is high or in [hot conditions](https://canberrabushwalkingclub.org/about-us/governance-and-policies/fire-danger-and-hot-weather/) when heat exhaustion and dehydration are possible.

Activities should not be undertaken in areas where a Total Fire Ban is in place, unless the activity is within an urban area. A Total Fire Ban differs from a Park fire ban; activities may continue, with caution, where there is a Park fire ban. During a multi-day walk, a leader may not know whether a Total Fire Ban has been declared, or a leader may discover that a Total Fire Ban has been declared but not be in a position to walk out safely. In such cases leaders should minimise risks as much as practicable.

#### An unplanned night out

If your party suffers a prolonged delay, it may be better to spend a controlled night in the bush rather than risk trying to get back to the cars in the dark. If considering this option, remember that your first responsibility is to yourself and your party rather than to anxious relatives and friends. Stop early enough to find as suitable a spot as possible. Make use of available shelter and keep warm and dry as best you can. Depending on the conditions, the type of walk and the participants, you are likely to have an opportunity to self-rescue.

When you do get out, let the Check-In Officer know as soon as possible.

#### Discrimination and harassment

You should be familiar with the Club’s [guidelines for dealing with discriminatory or harassing behaviour](https://canberrabushwalkingclub.org/about-us/governance-and-policies/discrimination/). Complaints about discriminatory or harassing behaviour should be referred to the President and Member Protection Information Officer.

#### Injury or illness on a trip

If an injury or illness does occur on your trip, it is important to act early. The need to look after a casualty has priority over any walking objectives. Do not assume that the medical condition will improve.

If someone in the party is suffering from heat stress, exhaustion or hypothermia, you and others in the party may be nearing the same state. Make use of the first aid skills and resources of the party to treat the casualty.

Regularly monitor and record details of the casualty’s condition and of any first aid that you administer. Depending on the circumstances, you may need to shorten or rearrange the trip, to lighten the casualty’s pack by distributing its contents; or to split the party to retrieve a vehicle or get help. On an overnight trip it may also be necessary to camp to allow the casualty to recover. If this is going to result in the trip being delayed, attempt to contact a Committee member.

#### Incidents requiring police involvement

You may stumble on a crime scene on a walk. If this occurs, do not disturb the scene but note the location (take a GPS reading) and other details of the scene and report these to the police. In the unlikely event of a death on a Club trip, remember that you are not qualified to certify that death has occurred as the casualty may be alive but in a coma and needs to be treated accordingly. For your protection, take extensive notes. In any case, you should treat the site of the death with the same care as you would if it were a crime scene. Take notes of the circumstances surrounding the death; protect the body from animals and the elements; mark the spot clearly; and report to police at the earliest possible opportunity.

## Legal and insurance requirements

#### Duty of care

All participants in Byron Hikers’ Club activities owe a duty of care to other participants. If you are the activity leader, or are more experienced, you owe a higher duty of care. If someone suffers injury or loss because you did not provide the level of care that a court considers reasonable in the circumstances, the court may require you to pay damages.

In assessing whether you provided an appropriate level of care, a court will consider:

* Whether you gave a warning about the hazard that contributed to the claimant’s loss or injury
* Whether the hazard was something inherent in the activity and/or should have been obvious to the claimant
* Whether the claimant themselves understood the risk (whether they signed the Club’s Acknowledgment of Risks and Obligations form is part of what the court may consider) and whether they should have taken more care
* The relative levels of experience of the people involved.

#### Insurance

The Club’s public liability insurance policy is designed to pay, by way of compensation on behalf of the Insured (the Club and its members), all sums which the Insured shall become legally liable to pay in respect to injury and or damage as a result of an occurrence in connection with the insured activities of the club, subject to the terms, conditions and exclusions of the policy.

The Club has Public Liability insurance cover to protect the Club, its leaders and its members from claims made by individuals or companies seeking damages for injury and/or property damage caused by negligent acts committed on Club bushwalks and some other activities. Our insurance policy only applies to Club activities and does not cover solo activities by Club members. The non-bushwalking activities covered by our insurance vary at the discretion of the insurer; some are excluded and some are covered only if participants sign a Risk Waiver (for risky activities in NSW). The list changes by the year and leaders need to check if intending to undertake such activities.

#### Leader training

The Club conducts training for leaders in navigation and in the use of a GPS. Participation in these activities will improve your skills, increase your confidence as a leader and broaden the range of trips you can lead. Other ad-hoc training activities are also offered.